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STRENGTHENING CHARACTER VALUE LITERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH FAMILY–SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

Character development in early childhood requires a supportive literacy environment that provides access to appropriate reading materials, promotes interactive literacy practices, and fosters collaboration between schools and families. This community service program aimed to strengthen character-value literacy among young children in Singasari Village through the development of a child-friendly mini-library and capacity building for teachers and parents. The program was implemented using a participatory approach involving teachers, parents, and children through the provision and organization of character-oriented storybooks, training in book management, socialization of read-aloud techniques using educational posters, storytelling activities, and interactive group games for parents. Data were collected qualitatively through focus group discussions (FGDs), observations, and documentation and were analyzed descriptively. The results indicate the establishment of a supportive literacy environment and the availability of character-oriented literacy resources, strengthened teacher capacity in managing reading materials and implementing interactive reading strategies, and enhanced parents' understanding of their roles in supporting children's literacy and character development at home. Children also gained more interactive literacy experiences through storytelling and character-based activities. The program demonstrates that integrating accessible literacy resources with teacher and parent capacity building can provide a practical foundation for strengthening character-value literacy in early childhood.

Keywords: early childhood, character-value literacy, family–school engagement

Abstrak

Pengembangan karakter pada anak usia dini memerlukan lingkungan literasi yang mendukung melalui akses bahan bacaan yang sesuai, praktik literasi interaktif, serta kolaborasi sekolah dan keluarga. Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan memperkuat literasi nilai karakter anak usia dini di Desa Singasari melalui pengembangan perpustakaan mini ramah anak serta peningkatan kapasitas guru dan orang tua. Program dilaksanakan secara partisipatif dengan melibatkan guru, orang tua, dan anak melalui penyediaan dan penataan buku cerita bermuatan karakter, penyuluhan manajemen buku, sosialisasi teknik membaca nyaring (*read-aloud*) menggunakan poster edukasi, kegiatan mendongeng, serta permainan kelompok interaktif bagi orang tua. Data dikumpulkan secara kualitatif melalui *focus group discussion* (FGD), observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif. Hasil menunjukkan tersedianya lingkungan dan sumber literasi bermuatan karakter, terlaksananya penguatan kapasitas guru dalam mengelola bahan bacaan dan strategi membaca interaktif, serta penguatan pemahaman orang tua mengenai perannya dalam mendukung literasi dan pembentukan karakter anak di keluarga. Anak memperoleh pengalaman literasi yang lebih interaktif melalui kegiatan mendongeng dan aktivitas berbasis karakter. Program menunjukkan bahwa integrasi sumber literasi dengan penguatan kapasitas guru dan orang tua dapat menjadi landasan praktis bagi penguatan literasi nilai karakter anak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: anak usia dini, keterlibatan keluarga-sekolah, literasi nilai karakter

Introduction

Early childhood education is a fundamental stage in the development of children's cognitive, social, emotional, and moral capacities (Oskar et al., 2025; Rumbidzai & Achebe, 2023; Arace et

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al., 2021; Sopiah, 2022). During this phase, the learning experiences children gain not only serve to build early academic skills but also lay the foundation for the habits, attitudes, and behaviors that will develop in later stages of life (Solang et al., 2024; Fitri et al., 2026; Meesak et al., 2025). Strengthening character values in early childhood should be considered an integral part of the educational process, not a standalone, supplementary activity (Anjari et al., 2026; Aisyah, 2023). Literacy plays a strategic role because it provides learning experiences that enable children to recognize meaning, values, and moral messages through activities tailored to their developmental characteristics (Agiestianie et al., 2025;Bradea et al., 2024).

Literacy in early childhood is not limited to the ability to recognize letters and read in a technical sense (Suharti et al., 2018). Literacy is also the process of building understanding through children's interactions with stories, pictures, language, characters, and meaningful experiences (Curtin, 2024; Mardiana et al., 2026). Picture books and fairy tales, for example, can serve as concrete tools for introducing values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, compassion, and cooperation. Through stories, children can identify the behaviors of characters, understand the consequences of actions, and connect moral messages to their everyday experiences. Thus, story-based literacy has the potential to bridge the process of learning values with enjoyable and contextual learning experiences (Maureen et al., 2022).

However, the use of literacy as a means of instilling character values requires a supportive ecosystem. The mere availability of books does not automatically lead to sustainable literacy practices. A child-friendly physical environment, the availability of relevant reading materials, educators' capacity to manage literacy resources, and teachers' ability to use interactive methods are interrelated components that support character-based literacy in early childhood (Lachapelle et al., 2024; Salins et al., 2025). Ar-Rafa 2 Early Childhood Education Center, in Singasari Village, faces a number of challenges in strengthening character education, including limited library facilities and a shortage of character-based reading materials, teachers' insufficient capacity to manage and utilize reading materials for character development, and insufficient parental involvement in reinforcing their children's character values. Based on the perspective of family extension, the involvement of teachers and parents is crucial because changes in child-rearing and educational practices cannot be achieved solely through one-way communication (Shebani et al., 2025; Norheim & Moser, 2020). Education efforts must be directed toward improving knowledge, skills, participation, and the ability to apply the messages in the context of daily life. The participatory approach used in the program positions partners as active participants from the very beginning, starting with needs assessment, planning.

Based on these needs, the program to Strengthen Character Values Literacy in Early Childhood at Ar-Rafa 2 Early Childhood Education Center in Singasari Village was designed as an integrative intervention that combines the provision of a child-friendly mini-library, storybooks containing character values, guidance on book organization, education on read-aloud techniques, storytelling activities, and games for internalizing character values with parents. The integration of these various components is a key aspect of the program.

Activity Method

The community service program was conducted at PAUD Ar-Rafa 2, Singasari Village, Jonggol District, Bogor Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The site was selected based on the identified needs of the community partner concerning the strengthening of character-value literacy in early childhood, particularly the limited availability of literacy facilities and resources, teachers' capacity to manage reading materials, and parental involvement in supporting character internalization. The community service activities consisted of preparation, implementation, evaluation, and output development stages. The main activities were conducted on May 5, 2026, at PAUD Ar-Rafa 2.



Figure 1. Village Map of Jonggol District

1. Target Beneficiaries/Program Partners

The target beneficiaries of the program are teachers, parents, and early childhood children at PAUD Ar-Rafa 2, who serve as the primary partners in the program. The selection of partners was based on an initial assessment indicating the need to strengthen the literacy environment, provide character-oriented reading materials, enhance teachers' capacity to manage and utilize reading resources, and increase family involvement in the internalization of character values. Teachers are positioned as managers and facilitators of literacy activities within the educational setting, while parents serve as primary companions who continue and reinforce literacy practices and character development within the family environment. Children are the direct beneficiaries of the program through reading experiences, storytelling activities, and play-based activities that promote character development. This approach enables the strengthening of character-value literacy not only at the individual child level but also through enhancing the capacity of key supporting actors within both the school and family environments.

2. Community Service Program Method

The program employs a participatory approach integrating extension, training, demonstrations, hands-on practice, and mentoring. This approach was selected to ensure that partners not only receive relevant information but also gain direct experience in managing literacy resources and implementing literacy activities as a means of internalizing character values. The stages of program implementation are illustrated in Figure 2.

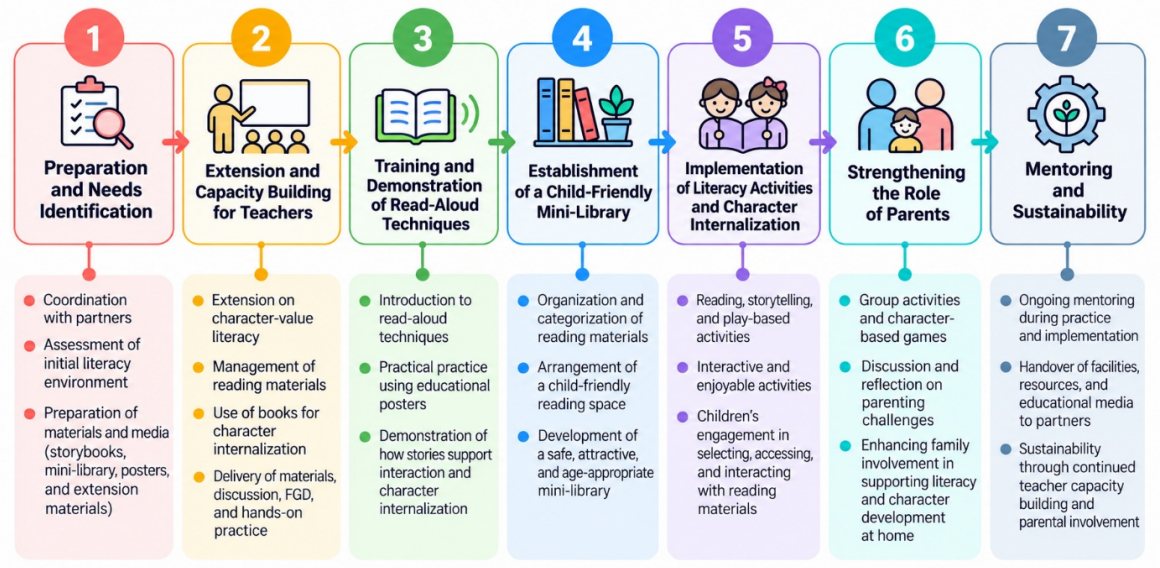


Figure 2. Community Service Implementation Stages

1) Preparation and Needs Identification
   The preparation stage involved coordination with partners, identification of the initial conditions of the literacy environment, and preparation of materials and activity media. At this stage, character-oriented storybooks, a child-friendly mini-library, educational posters, counseling materials, and supporting activity materials were prepared.
2) Extension and Capacity Building for Teachers
   Teachers received capacity-building sessions on character-value literacy, the organization and management of reading materials, and the use of books as a medium for character-value internalization. Activities were conducted through presentations, discussions, focus group discussions (FGDs), and hands-on practice. The sessions were supported by educational posters and sample reading materials to facilitate their application within the early childhood education context.
3) Training and Demonstration of Read-Aloud Techniques
   Teachers were introduced to and practiced read-aloud techniques using educational posters as practical guides. The demonstrations illustrated how stories can be used as a medium for interaction with children while simultaneously conveying character values in an engaging manner appropriate to the developmental characteristics of young children.
4) Establishment of a Child-Friendly Mini-Library
   The team and partners collaboratively organized literacy resources by categorizing and arranging reading materials and designing the reading area to make resources more accessible to children. The mini-library was developed as a safe, engaging, and developmentally appropriate literacy environment for young children.
5) Implementation of Literacy Activities and Character-Value Internalization
   Children participated in reading, storytelling, and play-based activities incorporating character values. The activities were designed interactively to provide children with opportunities to recognize and understand character values through stories and enjoyable learning experiences. Children's responses were observed through their involvement in selecting, accessing, and interacting with reading materials
6) Strengthening the Role of Parents
   Parents were involved through group activities and games designed to facilitate the internalization of character values. These activities served as a forum for discussion and reflection on the challenges of raising young children and the role of families in supporting literacy development and character formation at home.
7) Mentoring and Sustainability
   Mentoring was provided throughout the practice of organizing books, utilizing the mini-library, and implementing read-aloud techniques. Following the program, the facilities, literacy resources, and educational media were handed over to the partners for independent and continued use. Sustainability was supported through continued teacher capacity building and active parental involvement.

3. Success Indicators

The success of the program was determined based on changes in the literacy environment, teacher capacity, children's literacy experiences, and parental involvement. The success indicators are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Success Indicators of the Community Service Program

Aspect	Success Indicator
Literacy Environment	A child-friendly mini-library is available, organized, and established as a functional literacy space.
Literacy Resources	Character-oriented children's reading materials are available and can be utilized sustainably.

Aspect	Success Indicator
Teacher Capacity	Teachers understand reading-material management and are able to apply *read-aloud* strategies.
Children's Literacy Practices	Children actively participate in reading, storytelling, and character-based literacy activities.
Parental Involvement	Parents understand their role in supporting literacy activities and the habituation of character values at home.
Sustainability	Partners are able to independently utilize the facilities, reading materials, and educational media after the program is completed.

4. Evaluation Method

The program evaluation employed a descriptive qualitative approach to assess the implementation of activities, partner participation, participant responses, and changes following the intervention. Data were collected through observations, focus group discussions (FGDs), field notes, activity documentation, and partner feedback and recognition. The evaluation was conducted by comparing the partners' conditions before and after program implementation across five main aspects: (1) the literacy environment and resources; (2) teacher capacity; (3) children's literacy experiences; (4) parental involvement; and (5) school and family support for the internalization of character values. The data were analyzed descriptively by identifying observable changes throughout the implementation process and based on partners' responses. Observation was used to assess the involvement of teachers, parents, and children during the activities. FGDs were conducted to explore the experiences, understanding, and responses of teachers and parents. Documentation served as evidence of the implementation process and program outcomes, while the partner recognition letter provided supporting evidence of the program's acceptance and perceived benefits from the partners' perspective.

Result and Discussion

1. Preparation and Needs Identification

The preparation stage established the basis for implementing the character-value literacy strengthening program at PAUD Ar-Rafa 2, Desa Singasari. The activity began with coordination between the community service team and the partner institution, followed by an explanation of the program objectives, expected benefits, implementation mechanisms, and the respective roles of the parties involved. The participatory process provided an opportunity for the partner to communicate its actual conditions, expectations, and needs concerning literacy and character education. During the initial stage, the implementation team also observed the existing literacy environment and identified the need to improve the organization and accessibility of reading materials, strengthen teachers' capacity, and increase family involvement in character development. The opening session involved the school management, teachers, students, and the implementation team, and was characterized by positive participation and enthusiasm, including through ice-breaking activities with the children. This initial engagement was important because it established a shared understanding before the intervention proceeded to the more technical stages. This finding is consistent with participatory approaches in early childhood education, where meaningful engagement of practitioners and participants can facilitate contextualized interventions and improve ownership of educational change. Involving teachers and children in interactive educational processes can create stronger engagement and facilitate the translation of educational concepts into practice (Halimah et al., 2020).



Figure 3. Opening Event of Community Service

2. Extension and Capacity Building for Teachers

The second stage focused on teacher capacity building in library book organization and labeling to strengthen the management of the literacy environment at PAUD Ar-Rafa 2. Teachers were introduced to practical procedures for categorizing, labeling, and arranging books according to themes, age appropriateness, and children's accessibility. Educational posters were used as visual guides to illustrate the steps for book labeling, categorization, shelf arrangement, and simple library management, enabling teachers to apply the procedures directly during practice. The activity strengthened teachers' practical understanding of how systematic organization can make reading materials easier for children to identify, access, and use independently. A well-organized, print-rich literacy environment provides children with greater opportunities to interact meaningfully with printed materials, while practical teacher support is important for developing such environments (Khosa, 2025).



Figure 4. Library Book Management Extension

3. Training and Demonstration of Read-Aloud Techniques

The third stage focused on read-aloud training using educational posters and demonstration puppets to strengthen teachers' ability to deliver character-oriented stories interactively. Teachers practiced using voice intonation, facial expressions, gestures, and simple dialogue while integrating puppets as visual and interactive media during storytelling. The educational posters served as practical guides for the read-aloud sequence, while the puppets helped teachers demonstrate how story characters could be used to attract children's attention and communicate character values more concretely. The activity encouraged teachers to connect story content with children's everyday experiences through questions and simple reflective interactions. Interactive read-aloud supported by story props can enhance young children's engagement and understanding of stories, while puppet-mediated storytelling can facilitate meaningful interaction and character-value development in early childhood education (Rao et al., 2016).



Figure 5. Read-Aloud Training and Demonstration

4. Establishment of a Child-Friendly Mini-Library

The fourth stage focused on establishing a **child-friendly mini-library** by improving access to books and providing attractive, age-appropriate literacy resources for early childhood learners. The reading space was organized so that books could be reached independently by children, while the collection was selected to include engaging storybooks containing character values such as honesty, responsibility, independence, caring, cooperation, and respect. Visual presentation and the arrangement of reading materials were also considered to create a safe, comfortable, and stimulating literacy environment that encouraged children to explore books. The intervention therefore transformed the reading corner from a storage area into a more functional learning space that supported literacy and character development. High-quality preschool literacy environments should provide varied and accessible books, designated literacy areas, and developmentally appropriate print and literacy materials; accessible and well-organized print resources create greater opportunities for children to interact meaningfully with literacy materials (Yang et al., 2024).



Figure 6. Establishment of a Child-Friendly Mini-Library

5. Implementation of Literacy Activities and Character Internalization

The fifth stage implemented read-aloud and storytelling activities focusing on character values with the children. Teachers used character-oriented storybooks and applied the techniques introduced during training, including expressive intonation, facial expressions, gestures, and interactive questions to maintain children's attention. Through storytelling, children were encouraged to identify characters' behaviors, recognize positive values such as honesty, responsibility, caring, and cooperation, and relate the messages of the stories to their everyday experiences. Observation indicated that the activities provided children with a more interactive and enjoyable literacy experience while creating opportunities to introduce character values through meaningful narratives. Shared book reading accompanied by teacher–child dialogue can promote children's social-emotional understanding, particularly when discussion connects characters' emotions, behaviors, situations, and consequences to children's own experiences (Ng & Sun, 2022). Research in Indonesian early childhood settings also found that storytelling supported by character-oriented narratives and puppet media can facilitate children's engagement and positive responses to moral values (Halimah et al., 2020).



Figure 7. Read Aloud Activity with Students

6. Strengthening the Role of Parents

The sixth stage focused on strengthening parents' role in internalizing character values through an interactive group-based game. The activity presented everyday parenting situations and character-related questions that encouraged parents to discuss, reflect, and exchange experiences concerning children's character development at home. The mothers demonstrated high enthusiasm and active participation throughout the group discussions and games, creating an engaging atmosphere for shared learning and reflection. The activity strengthened parents' awareness that character development requires consistency between school-based learning and habituation within the family. Parental involvement plays an important role in early childhood character development and that meaningful collaboration between families and educational institutions can support children's social-emotional development (Setiana et al., 2026).



Figure 8. Character Internalizasion Games with Parents

7. Mentoring and Sustainability

The seventh stage focused on periodic mentoring and program sustainability as part of the three-to-five-year community service partnership between the university and PAUD Ar-Rafa 2, with the current implementation representing the second year of the program. Mentoring was conducted coordinatively through regular communication with school management to monitor the use of the mini-library, literacy resources, and character-based literacy activities. Program sustainability was supported through the provision of a child-friendly mini-library, character-oriented reading materials, and educational posters containing practical guidance that were displayed on the school walls so they could be accessed by teachers and other members of the school community. This strategy enabled the intervention to extend beyond the implementation period by embedding literacy resources and practical guidance within the school's everyday learning environment.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The community service program at PAUD Ar-Rafa 2 demonstrated that strengthening character-value literacy can be achieved through the integration of a child-friendly mini-library,

character-oriented reading materials, teacher capacity building, read-aloud and storytelling activities, and parental involvement. The novelty of the program lies in developing a literacy ecosystem that connects the school and family environments within an integrated and sustainable intervention. The program benefited the community by creating a more organized literacy environment, enhancing teachers' skills, providing children with more interactive literacy experiences, and strengthening parents' roles in character development. Theoretically, the program reinforces the perspective that character-value internalization in early childhood should be supported through interactions among the learning environment, educators, children, and families.Future programs are recommended to implement longitudinal mentoring through regular monitoring of mini-library utilization, read-aloud practices, and parental involvement within the three- to five-year partnership framework. Further evaluation should also incorporate simple quantitative instruments and pre–post measurements to document changes in teacher capacity, children's literacy experiences, and family literacy practices more systematically.

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